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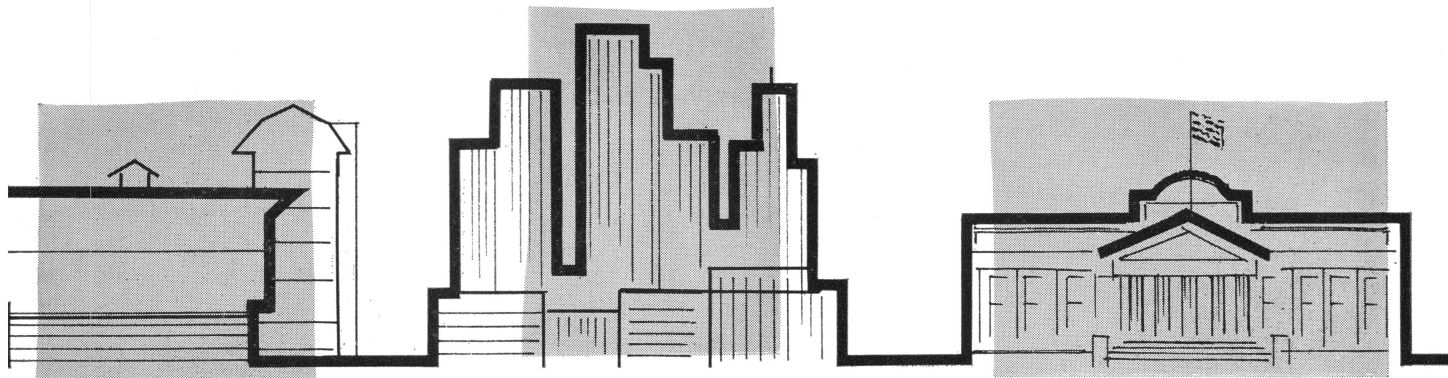
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# What Careers for Farm Boys ?

This is the first of a series of articles reporting the results of a study of the career preferences and plans of farm boys. This article tells of career plans the boys made and of their immediate after high school plans.

by Donald R. Kaldor, Eber Eldridge, Lee G. Burchinal and I. W. Arthur

**E**ACH YEAR, several thousand young men born and raised on farms finish high school in Iowa and go in search of satisfying occupations or careers. Their future welfare is closely tied to the choices they make and the opportunities they have. The choices they make also have important long-run implications for farm and nonfarm income-earning possibilities and for efficient use of the nation's manpower generally.

The Center for Agricultural and Economic Adjustment at Iowa State has started several studies of the career plans and choices of farm boys. The first of these studies was begun in 1959 and now has been completed. We'll be reporting the results in several articles in *IOWA FARM SCIENCE*.

This first study was concerned with the plans that Iowa farm boys were making and the factors that influenced their plans. We collected information by questionnaire from 870 farm boys—all members of the 1959 graduating class of 116 high schools in towns and communities of less than 25,000 population. In this article, we'll look mainly at the occupational and other after high school plans of the boys. In later

articles, we'll look more closely at the factors that influenced the boys in making their plans.

## What Career Plans?

What kinds of occupations do Iowa farm boys plan to enter for life careers? We found that nearly 38 percent of the 870 boys surveyed planned on full-time farming. About 58 percent planned to enter nonfarm occupations. Slightly more than 1 percent planned to combine farming with a nonfarm job, and about 3 percent had no long-range occupational plans.

The 58 percent expecting to enter nonfarm occupations planned for a wide variety of careers. Nearly 43 percent of this group planned to enter one of the professions—such as law, medicine, engineering or teaching. About 22 percent planned to become craftsmen; the occupations most frequently mentioned were carpenter, electrician, mechanic, machinist and radio-tv repairman. Less than 5 percent planned clerical work, and about the same percentage were planning military careers. Almost 15 percent said they definitely were planning a nonfarm career but hadn't yet chosen a specific occupation (see chart).

The proportions of senior farm boys who planned to farm varied in different parts of the state. In southeastern Iowa, 46 percent of the boys planned to farm. The

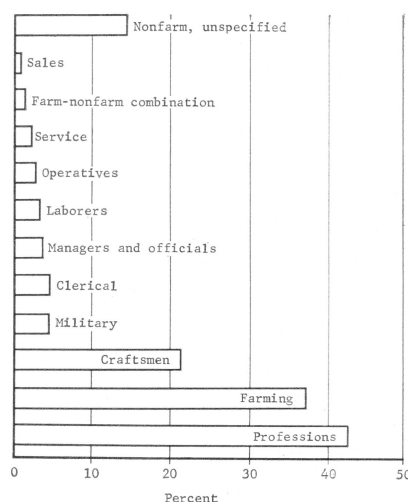
proportion for northeastern Iowa was 42 percent; for central Iowa, 38 percent. In both northwestern and southwestern Iowa, 36 percent of the boys planned to farm. A preliminary analysis of the variations by areas, however, failed to show any relationship with the level of farm income, with school size or with the degree of industrialization in any of the areas.

## How Certain?

Like any other plans, occupational plans may be made and held with varying degrees of confidence. We asked each of the boys to indicate the degree of certainty or uncertainty he attached to his career plan—certain, fairly certain, fairly uncertain or very uncertain.

About 13 percent of the boys

Distribution of Career Plans.



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considered their career plans as certain. Nearly 58 percent viewed their plans as fairly certain. On the other side, 22 percent indicated that their plans were fairly uncertain, while 7 percent stated that they considered their plans as very uncertain.

We found, too, that boys who were planning to farm were more certain about their career plans than were the boys planning to enter nonfarm occupations. Almost 80 percent of the boys planning to farm considered their plans as certain or fairly certain. Only 66 percent of the boys planning nonfarm careers indicated this much certainty. Apparently, a larger proportion of the boys planning to farm more firmly expected their career plans to materialize.

### **When Did They Decide?**

Most of the boys had arrived at their career plans before they became seniors in high school. Nearly 20 percent said they'd reached their decision before entering the tenth grade. Plans were formed by 11 percent during the tenth grade and, by 29 percent, during the eleventh grade. But 40 percent said they didn't decide until they were in their senior year of high school.

Boys who were planning to farm arrived at their decisions earlier than the boys planning nonfarm careers. One-third of the boys who planned to farm had made their plans to farm before entering the tenth grade. Only 9 percent of the boys planning nonfarm careers had reached their decisions that early. About 80 percent of the boys planning nonfarm careers didn't make their decisions until either the eleventh or twelfth grades—in contrast to only 54 percent of the boys planning to farm who made their decisions that late.

For both groups, we found a relationship between the uncertainty of their career plans and the length of time that they had held the plans. The longer a boy had held his plan, the more certainty he attached to it.

Of the boys planning to farm who considered their plans as cer-

tain, 58 percent had made their plans before entering the tenth grade. Only 22 percent of this group had arrived at their plans as late as the eleventh and twelfth grades. In contrast, 89 percent of the boys planning to farm who considered their plans as very uncertain did not arrive at their plans until the eleventh and twelfth grades, and less than 6 percent of this group had made their plans before entering the tenth grade.

We found the same tendency or pattern among boys planning nonfarm careers. About 18 percent of the boys in this group who considered their plans as certain had formed them before entering the tenth grade; only 3 percent of those who considered their plans as very uncertain had arrived at their plans this early. Almost 94 percent of the boys, in contrast, who considered their plans as very uncertain hadn't made their plans until as late as the eleventh and twelfth grades.

### **Parents' Views . . .**

Did many of the boys' parents have careers in mind for their sons? If they did, only a small proportion made their views known to their sons. When each boy was asked if his father had a job in mind for which he thought his son should plan, only 25 percent of the boys said yes. About the same percentage said yes when the same question was asked regarding mothers.

What does this mean? For at least three out of four boys, there apparently was no obvious effort on the part of parents to influence their sons toward any particular occupation.

Among the fathers who did have a career in mind for their sons, 46 percent wanted their sons to farm, and 54 percent wanted their sons to enter a nonfarm occupation. For the fathers who wanted their sons to farm, 72 percent of the sons were planning to farm. And, for the fathers who wanted their sons to enter a nonfarm occupation, 77 percent of the sons were planning a nonfarm career.

Among the mothers who did

have a career in mind for their sons, the percentage of mothers favoring a career in farming for their sons was smaller than for fathers. Only 31 percent of the mothers wanted their sons to farm, while 69 percent wanted their sons to enter nonfarm occupations.

For the minority of boys whose parents did have particular occupations in mind for their sons, we found a high degree of similarity between the career plans of the boys and the careers that the parents had in mind for their sons.

While parental career plans were reported by a larger number of boys planning to farm than of boys planning nonfarm jobs, the difference was not large. About 8 percent of the boys who planned to farm indicated that their fathers wanted them to enter a nonfarm occupation. Similarly, 5 percent of the boys who planned to enter a nonfarm occupation said that their fathers wanted them to farm.

### **Why Nonfarm Choices?**

We asked the boys who were planning a nonfarm career why they didn't plan to farm. They gave a wide variety of reasons, but some were mentioned more frequently than others. About 55 percent of the boys planning nonfarm occupations said they weren't planning to farm because it took too much capital. Nearly 44 percent listed "unfavorable working conditions" as a reason, and 40 percent simply said that they didn't like farming and weren't interested in it. Poor income-earning opportunity was listed by 38 percent. Other reasons often mentioned were "income too unstable" and "no opportunity to farm."

Most of the boys gave more than one reason for not planning to farm. We'll report in later articles on how some of these and other factors influenced the boys' career plans.

### **Career Obstacles . . .**

What difficulties did the boys expect in realizing their occupational plans? In answer to a di-

rect question, we found that almost 60 percent of the boys expected to have some difficulty in entering the occupation of their choice. Boys planning nonfarm careers anticipated difficulty just about as often as did boys who were planning to farm.

Financial difficulties were mentioned most frequently by both. More than 40 percent of the boys planning to farm expected trouble in getting enough capital to get started. Only 5 percent of the boys planning nonfarm careers mentioned this factor as such. But 27 percent of the boys planning nonfarm careers did anticipate difficulty in financing the training for their careers. Only 3 percent of the boys planning to farm mentioned this as an expected difficulty.

A large proportion of the boys planning nonfarm careers expected to take additional training after high school. Many were planning careers that require a college education. Hence, these boys were thinking about the cost of training. Since there are no rigid educational requirements for entering farming, the boys planning to farm were more concerned about financing the relatively large investment needed to get started.

A larger proportion of the boys planning nonfarm careers than of boys planning to farm indicated doubts about their capacity to do the work required in the occupations chosen. Remember, that nearly 43 percent of the boys planning nonfarm occupations had chosen careers in one of the professions.

What Influences?

What sources of influence did farm boys consider important in helping them to make their occupational plans? In order of decreasing frequency, boys who planned to farm mentioned work-on-the-job, parents, FFA experience, close friends and 4-H experience. Boys who planned nonfarm careers mentioned parents frequently, too, but less often than the boys planning to farm

TABLE 1. Sources of influence considered important by farm boys in making their occupational plans.

Source of influence	Percentages of boys indicating various sources as important influences	
	Boys planning to farm	Boys planning nonfarm careers
Work-on-the-job	78	26
Parents	67	47
FFA experience	35	5
Close friends	24	43
4-H experience	24	3
Study at school	15	36
Occupation of person I admire	14	23
Reading	13	37
Vocational guidance	12	15
Teachers	8	23
Radio and TV	4	11

(see table 1). Close friends, reading, study at school, work-on-the-job, teachers and the occupations of other persons the boy "admired" were the next most frequent sources of influence mentioned by the boys planning nonfarm careers.

Thus, sources associated with farming—such as work-on-the-job, parents and FFA and 4-H experience—generally were mentioned more often by boys planning to farm than by the boys planning nonfarm occupations. Sources associated with nonfarm activities were mentioned more frequently by the boys who were planning nonfarm occupations.

How the boys may have viewed these sources of influence isn't clear. That is, a source may have provided either a positive influence or a negative influence. Work experience in farming, for example, could encourage a boy to farm if his experiences are satisfying; if not, the same work experience could be discouraging.

If we assume, however, that the boys were more likely to mention positive sources of influence rather than negative ones, it appears that work-on-the-job, parents, FFA and 4-H experience

gave more encouragement in the direction of farming than in the direction of nonfarm careers.

After School Plans . . .

The information we obtained on the boys' plans following high school indicated that about half of the boys expected to go to work immediately. The others expected to get more education or training. There was a big difference, however, in the after high school plans of the boys planning to farm and of those planning nonfarm careers.

Boys planning nonfarm careers much more often were planning additional education or training than were boys who were planning to farm. Of the boys who were planning to farm, only 24 percent were planning additional education or training, while 76 percent were planning to go to work immediately.

In sharp contrast, 68 percent of the boys planning nonfarm occupations were planning additional education or training. Only 32 percent were planning to go to work immediately after high school (see table 2).

Thus, the results of this study indicate that farm boys who plan to farm have lower educational hopes or plans than the farm boys planning nonfarm careers. It may be that the boys planning to farm believed that additional education or training is less important in farming than in nonfarm occupations. Or, they may have seen less direct value in further education or training.

Whatever the reason, it seems clear that—if the occupational and educational plans of these farm boys are realized—the average level of education of the boys entering farming will be lower than those entering nonfarm occupations.

TABLE 2. Immediate after high school plans of farm boys.

Plan	Boys planning to farm		Boys planning nonfarm careers		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Plan to go to work	251	76	162	32	413	49
Plan to get more education and training	79	24	344	68	423	51
TOTAL	330	100	506	100	836	100